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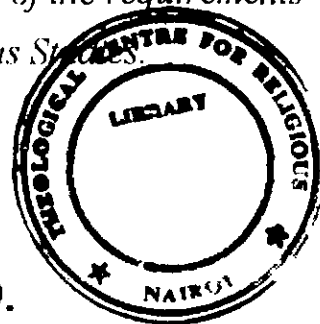
## THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN LK 1: 26-38

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*This is a Long Essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religious Studies.*

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## Student's Declaration

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for Academic Credit to any other Institution. All sources have been cited in full.

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Godfrey Odunga.

# **Dedication**

*Mrs. Charity Kaluki Ngilu*

# Acknowledgment

There are a number of people who have helped me in writing this Long Essay. Since it is not possible to mention all of them, I will just mention a few of them. Firstly, I am thankful to the following: my mother, on whom I totally depended before I was born, and for her maternal love; my beloved father for enabling us to recognize the equality of brother and sister, equality of man and woman. For the primary evangelization they do in the family. My sister Pauline Odunga for positively responding to my questions of interpretation of some Scripture passages.

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## INTRODUCTION

The practice of reading and studying of the Bible in the Church is gradually taking root, especially during this post-Vatican II era. This is a positive step in the process of evangelization and missionary activity worldwide. In Africa, the reading of the Bible has been enthusiastically promoted in the Protestant Churches notwithstanding the obstacle of illiteracy in the last decades. It is quite recommendable that the Catholic Church is now taking seriously this aspect of evangelization. Apart from the institutions of learning, the Basic Christian Communities have proved to be efficient in this process from the grassroots.

The above awareness and experience in the pastoral field of the many questions raised about the message and content of the Bible is what has prompted me to opt for this kind of research. It is the challenge of African scholars to respond to this urgent need using the opportunities available.

In this research I have employed scholarly tools and methodology appropriate to the critical study of the Bible. Therefore in the first chapter we shall start with the exegesis and then theological analysis of the text of Lk1:26-38, which is the subject matter of this study. Then will follow the third stage of venturing into the task of applying the fruit of our exegesis in our contemporary African context. This passage is unique and quite relevant since it announces the coming of Our Lord and proclaims fundamental mysteries of our faith.

## CHAPTER ONE

### EXEGESIS

#### 1. THE TEXT OF LUKE 1: 26-38

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be.

<sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

<sup>31a</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,

<sup>31b</sup> and you shall call his name Jesus.

<sup>32a</sup> He will be great, and will be called the son of the Most High;

<sup>32b</sup> And the lord God will give to him the throne of his father David;

<sup>33a</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever;

<sup>33b</sup> and of his kingdom there will be no end".

<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the Angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?"

<sup>35</sup> And the Angel said to her,

<sup>35b</sup> "The Holy spirit will come upon you,

<sup>35c</sup> and the power of the most high will overshadow you;

<sup>35d</sup> Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

<sup>36</sup> And behold; your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For with God nothing will be impossible". <sup>38</sup> And Mary said, " Behold, I am the handmaid of the lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the Angel departed from her. (RSV).

## 2. EXEGESIS OF LK. 1: 26-38

1:26. *In the sixth month*: This is in reference to Elizabeth's already mentioned pregnancy in Lk 1:24. It provides a continuation of narrative with 1:36 and prepares for further continuation in verses 39-56 which deal with the visitation . Therefore the event is part of an overall divine plan.<sup>1</sup>

.... *the angel Gabriel was sent from God*: This also affects continuity with Lk 1:5-25, though here Gabriel does not announce himself by name, and there is no indication that Mary knows who he is.<sup>2</sup>

..... *to a city of Galilee named Nazareth*: Galilee, which figures as the scene of Jesus' public ministry was a region of Palestine stretching from Samaria and the Jordan in the south and east to the border of Syrian Phoenicia in the north and west. It also had mixed races. In Mt. the annunciation to Joseph takes place in Bethlehem where the child is born (Mt. 2:1) and the parents live (Mt. 2:11). They settled in Nazareth after their return from Egypt (Mt. 2:22-23). On the other hand in Lk the annunciation to Mary takes place in Nazareth but the birth takes place in Bethlehem just as in Matthew, Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament and that points to its insignificance.<sup>3</sup>

Verse 27 *...to a virgin betrothed*: The word *Parthenos* is LXX translation of the OT *alma* which is a Hebrew word meaning either a girl who has reached maturity or a young unmarried woman (Gen 24:43; Ex 2:8).<sup>4</sup> The term can refer to any unmarried woman without specific reference to sexual experience. This Lucan phrase resembles Dt 22:23 in which it is shown that "betrothed" is

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<sup>1</sup> C.F. Evans, *St. Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of The Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (N.Y: Doubleday, 1993), p.287.

<sup>4</sup> G. Delling, "Parthenos." In: Kittel, G., and G. Friedrich. eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), p. 786.

already a binding commitment. However, Luke stresses the fact that Mary was Joseph's "betrothed" (*emnesteumene*).<sup>5</sup>

.....*a man whose name was Joseph*: Joseph, Mary's fiancé bears an ancient biblical name popular among the Jews in the post-exilic period (Ezra 10:42, Neh. 12:14; 1Chr. 25:2,9). It was probably a shorter form of a theophoric name which could be translated as "*may Yahweh add*" (other children to the one just born; cf. Ezra 8:10). Both Joseph the Patriarch in the Genesis story and that and Joseph in Matthew and Luke's narratives, attempt to discern the divine intention in a humanly difficult situation.<sup>6</sup>

..... *of the house of David*: This is an OT phrase common in Greek texts (1Kg 12:19, 2 Chr 23:3). It expresses Joseph's Davidic descent in this context as mentioned in Lk. 2:4 and 3:23. This phrase is a preparation for 1:32-33 where Jesus is related to the Davidic dynasty of Joseph's genealogy (3:23-38).<sup>7</sup>

.....*and the virgin's name was Mary*: The mother of Jesus bears the name of the sister of Moses known as Miriam (Ex 15:20). The form that Luke uses is *Mariam* (LXX) whereas in Hebrew it is *Miraym*. *Maria* is a better translation. *Maryam*, from which *Maria* developed, is a Semitic name, of Canaanite origin, and was probably related to the noun *mrym*, found in both Ugaritic and Hebrew (cf. Prov. 3:35), meaning, "height or summit". As a name of a woman it might have connoted something like "excellence". *Hannah* (Grace), and *Edna* (pleasure) are other related abstract feminine names.<sup>8</sup>

Verse 28: *Hail, O favoured one*: To get the right sense of the perfect passive participle of *charitoo* is difficult and so the Gk inadequately translates it as *chaire Kecharitomene*. The

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Luke Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (New York: The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 1981), p. 344.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 344.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

evidence and expression of favour Mary has received from God is her being enabled to bear the Messiah. The scene as a whole is close to Judges 13:2-7. It has verbal allusions from Zech 9:9 and Zeph 3:14, each of which has strong Messianic overtones.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding the above linguistic discrepancies, the imperative *chaire* could mean any of the following: the greeting *chaire* (cf Mt. 26:49), may mean "rejoice" rather than "greeting" (Lk 1:28). Here *Kecharitomene* (favoured one) gives it special significance. The meaning of both verbs and nouns are taken in this context in which they are used.<sup>10</sup>

Some translations have the phrase; "Blessed are you among women" as the final clause (for instance NAB and the Vulgate). Many commentators hold the view that this is certainly a later addition to Luke's text by a scribe who anticipated here the identical words found in the greeting of Elizabeth to Mary in Lk 1:42.<sup>11</sup>

.....*the lord is with you!*: This is a common OT expression although it occurs as a greeting only in Ruth 2:4 which has been understood as a wish whereas in Judg 6:17 it is rather a declaration. In both cases it lacks a verb as here in Luke. The angelic appearance to Gideon and the similarity of greeting in both Judg 6:12 and Lk 1:28 demand that the phrase be understood here as a declaration. It is also a later explanation of Mary's perplexity in the following verse. In OT this phrase means Yahweh's help and assistance and has a military connotation. *Kyrios* (Lord), refers to Yahweh in this particular context.<sup>12</sup>

Verse 29: *But she was greatly troubled*: Mary's response here, as in a typical annunciation pattern, is to be startled, or deeply troubled, or perplexed. It is a strange form of the verb used also in Zachariah's reaction (Lk 1:12). For Mary it was at the words of the angel whereas it was at

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> H. Conzelman, "Chairo." In: Kittel and Friedrich, *op. cit.*, p. 1300.

<sup>11</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>12</sup> Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

the sight of the angel for Zachariah. She wondered about the favour and the angel enlightens her.<sup>13</sup>

Verse 30: ***Do not be afraid***. This is another standard OT reassurance given by the angel (Lk 1:13; Gen. 15:1; Dan 10:12, 19 and also in Lk 1:30, 2:10; 8:50. However in recent research, it has been affirmed that the phrase “fear not”, *me phobou*, while it occurs in all of R.E. Brown’s examples (cf Table 1 below) of the genre in the NT, does not occur in any of the OT texts which he lists as representative of the genre.. For example “*me phobou*” is not mentioned in Judg 13:23. The phrase instead occurs in OT form which announces or promises “offspring” (*zera*) especially to the patriarchs.<sup>14</sup>

.....***you have found favour with God***. This is also an OT expression as in Gen. 6:8; 18:3; 1Sam 1:18. It explains the real sense of the participle in verse 28. *Charis* is a favourite Lucan word.<sup>15</sup>

Verse 31..... ***you will conceive in your womb and bear a son***: This message to Mary is couched in rather stereotyped OT phraseology for announcing the conception and birth of an extra - ordinary child. In the OT the expression is addressed sometimes to a woman who is already pregnant, and sometimes to one who will conceive in the immediate future. For example, Gen 16:11 reads thus ..... "the Lord's messenger said to her, "You are now pregnant and shall bear a son; you shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard you, God has answered you" (NAB).

The Hebrew text has *hinnak harah*, "you are pregnant", and LXX uses the present *en gastris echeis*. Also in Judg 13:3,5, "you will conceive and give birth to a son" (Revised English Bible).

The Hebrew has "you are pregnant" whereas LXX makes a future of it, "You will conceive;" and the other LXX reads (cf. Gen 16:11; Isa 7:14), "Lo, a young woman is pregnant and bearing a son".<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> John P. Keaty, *Luke's Gospel Today* (New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1979), p. 123.

<sup>14</sup> Edgar W. Conrad, "The Biblical Annunciation of Birth". In., *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 47, 1985, p. 657.

<sup>15</sup> Fitzmyer *op. cit.*, P. 346.

..... *and you shall call his name Jesus*: This phrase reappears in Mt. 1:21, 23, 25 and Lk 1:13. In Luke, Mary is told to name the child, whereas in Mt. 1:21 it is Joseph who does it. In OT, either Father (Gen. 4:26; 5:3) or Mother (Gen. 4:25) could name the child. Furthermore in OT it is evident that divinely favoured women named children e.g. Hagar in Gen 16:11 and Leah (Gen 30:3), Samson's mother in Judg 13:24 and Samuel's mother (1 Sam 1:20). R. Brown cautions that this naming by Mary constitutes no proof that Luke thinks of Mary as descendant of David.<sup>17</sup>

The name Jesus is a Gk form of the late development of the Hebrew name for Joshua (*Yehosua*). The first element is a form of *Yahu* (Yahweh) and the last imperative (*sw*) is translated as "help". It is a name that has something to do with God. Therefore the name would mean "Yahweh, help", expressing the cry of the mother in childbirth. Later *Yehosua* was contracted to *Yosua* (e.g. Ezra 2:6), transcribed in the LXX as *Iesous*. Since the name *Yesua* sounds like *Yesuah*, which is from a different root and means "salvation", Jesus' name came to be popularly understood as a form of the root of the word "save" in Hebrew. Mt. 1:21 uses this popular etymology. Otherwise, asserts J. Fitzmyer, the real root of the name Jesus or Joshua is (*sw*), which means, "help".<sup>18</sup>

Verse 32. *He will be great*.....Great which is translated *meGas* in Gk, is used of John the Baptist in verse 15 and here of Jesus. It is not common in the NT in this particular sense. *Megas* is not understood as human greatness, as in Mk 10:42, but was used absolutely of God in the OT and is here qualified by the phrase "before the Lord" i.e. in God's eyes and through his place in God's purposes. It is presumably in this sense that John is the greatest of men/women in Lk 7:28, as is David in 2Sam. 7:9.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 347.

<sup>17</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (N. Y: The Anchor Bible Reference Library, 1997), p. 230.

<sup>18</sup> Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

<sup>19</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

.....*and will be called the son of the most High*: The article "the" before "Son" is not present in Gk translation. This title *ho hypsitos* is a favourite Lucan designation for God as in 1:35, 76; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48; 16:17; Elsewhere it appears only in Mk 5:7 and Hebrew 7:1. The demoniac calls Jesus "Son of God the Most High (Lk 8:28). Jesus tells his followers that if they have selfless love they will be called " sons of the Most High" (6:35).<sup>20</sup>

..... *and the Lord will give him the throne of his father David*: In the Qumran literature the Davidic Messiah is called the "Messiah of Israel" (1QSa 2:14, 20; cf 1QS 9:11; CD 20:1).

it is stated thus;

*"..... the coming of the Messiah of Righteousness, the shoot of David, for him and to his seed has been given the royal mandate over his people for everlasting generations"(cf. 4Q PatrBes 2:4).<sup>21</sup>*

The author of Qumran, moreover, quotes 2Sam 7:11-14 and interprets the oracle of Nathan (4Q Flor. 10-13) whereby he clearly attributes a salvific mission to the Davidic Messiah. Isaiah 11:1 is related to "the shoot of David". Also part of the oracle of Balaam (Nm 24:15-17) is also applied to the Davidic Messiah.<sup>22</sup> Therefore Qumran literature thus testifies to the development in thought of an OT tradition about David.

Verse 33: *And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom will have no end*: This is a further elaboration of the previous verse 32 with the continuation and permanence of David's descendency and his rule promised in 2Sam 7:13 and reiterated in Ps 89:36 and Isa 9:6. Here it is now appropriated to Jesus, attributing to his unending rule over the house of Jacob. This is an archaic designation for Israel as portrayed in Gen 46:27, Ex 19:3, Isa 2:5 ff. and Is 8:17.

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<sup>20</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer S.J., *Essays on The Semitic Background of the New Testament* (Montana: Scholar Press, 1974), p.120.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Jesus might not have proclaimed himself directly as the King of Israel but a Jewish Christian tradition thought of him in terms of a political Messiah and so they had a view related to a worldly eschatology.

Luke probably assumed the sense used in Acts 13:22-27, where Jesus as the Saviour provided by God for Israel, is of David's ancestry. He is made God's Son by resurrection, through which he is exalted by God. In Luke Jesus is the fulfilment of the promise of God to Israel.<sup>23</sup>

Verse 34: *How shall this be.....?* Mary is puzzled by the message of the angel in verses 32-33 on the anticipated accomplishment of the child. Her question can be compared to Zachariah's in Lk 1:18. "How can I know this?" (New Jerusalem Bible). However the latter's question is taken to be an objection to the angel's assertion<sup>24</sup>.

..... *since* ..... ?" This is the only place that *epei* (since) appears in Lucan writings. This has been advanced as a proof of the claim that verse 34 is not Lucan. However, a number of commentaries state that, that alone is hardly enough to make 1:34 non-Lucan. On the other hand, Luke uses another conjunction closely related to *epei*, that is, *epeide* in a casual sense (Lk 11:6, Acts 13:46, 14:12, 15:24).<sup>25</sup>

".....*I have no husband* ?" Literally this phrase reads; "I do not know a man (husband)". In Greek it is worded thus, *andra ou ginosko* which implies that the author intends *andras*, which refers to husband, and not just *anthropos*, which is man in a general sense. In this context the verb "to know", that is *ginoskein*, is a euphemism or rather a semitism, for marital relations and so refers to sexual intercourse as it is usually used in Hellenistic Greek and LXX, for instance, in the case of Mt 1:25, Judges 11:35; 21:12 and 19:8 of Genesis.<sup>26</sup> Mt. 1:25 reads; "...and he had not known her when she bore a son" (Latin Vulgate).

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<sup>23</sup> Evans *op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen J. Binz, Advent of the Saviour: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives of Jesus (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1975), p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

In Judges 11:39 it is written "...she had never slept with a man" in reference to the daughter of Jephthah. Also Judge 21:12 and in Gen 19:18 it is written; "Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man" (NRSV).

The words of Mary in 1: 34 confirm what has been said about her virginity in verse 27 and express wonder at such an extraordinary announcement. The following comment deserves a hearing for proper interpretation of the Marian question:

*If we do not presume that we are dealing with biography, however, and recognise that an objection is a standard feature of the annunciation pattern, the question in 1:34 is easily explicable as a literary device designed to advance the story and dialogue. It offers the angel a chance to explain that the conception will be virginal and to give the sign involving Elizabeth's pregnancy, thus preparing for the visitation.<sup>27</sup>*

Verses 35: *The Holy Spirit*.....In Luke and Acts, *pneuma* occurs three times more often than in Mark. In Lk 4:1 Jesus is full of Spirit, not subject to the Spirit but acting by the Spirit. In 4:18 the Spirit abides on Jesus. In the conception by the Spirit (1:35), the *pneuma* is God's life-giving power; but the result of the act is what counts, namely that Jesus has the Spirit from the beginning.<sup>28</sup>

The definite article "the" is not present in the Greek text whereby this expression is anarthrous as in Lk 1:15 and Mt. 1:18 in reference to the annunciation of John the Baptist's and Jesus' birth respectively. However, treating it as "holy spirit" distorts the evangelist's theology, since this comes in use after considerable Christian reflection upon the holy Spirit.

R. E. Brown, J. Fitzmyer and other exegetes, hold that the expression should not be construed to mean that Matthew and Luke have developed a theology of the Spirit as a person

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<sup>27</sup> Raymond E. Brown, et al., Mary in the New Testament (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978), p. 115.

<sup>28</sup> E. Schweizer. In: Kittel and Friedrich, op. cit., p. 887.

of the Trinity or incarnation Christology. These are later church traditions that have overstretched the interpretation of verse 35.<sup>29</sup>

At this juncture it's worth quoting Brown as he cautions on the interpretation of this verse;

*There is never a suggestion in Matthew or in Luke that the Holy Spirit is the Male element in a union with Mary, supplying the husband's role in begetting. Not only is the Holy Spirit not male (feminine in Hebrew, neuter in Greek), but also the manner of begetting is implicitly creative rather than sexual.<sup>30</sup>*

He further argues that the non-sexual virginal conception of Jesus does not find exact parallels in other religions in the 1st century. In the conception of Jesus, there is no male element to impregnate Mary<sup>31</sup>.

35b .....*will come upon you* .... The above phrase appears seven times in Luke-Acts but only twice in the rest of the New Testament. It is expressed as *eperchesthai*, which is a Greek verb that does not have the connotation of sexual intercourse in the human sense, as it is shown in the foregoing explication.

"The Holy Spirit" and the "power of the most high" on the one hand and the verbs "come upon" and "overshadow" on the other hand are parallel expressions in each case. *Epelthonos*, (plural of *eperchesthai*), is used in Acts 1:8 to mean the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Jesus at Pentecost. The OT parallels are, for example, in the Prophetic Books.<sup>33</sup>

The Old Testament parallels for 35b are Is 32:15 and 1Sam 16:13". At this, Samuel took the horn of oil.... and the spirit of Yahweh seized on David from that day onwards". In Isaiah we

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<sup>29</sup> Brown, The Birth of Messiah, op.cit., pp. 124 -125.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond E. Brown, The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus (NY: Paulist Press, 1973) . p. 62.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, The Birth of Messiah, op. cit., p. 90.

read... "Until the spirit is poured out on us from above." (Isaiah 32:15) which literally refers to the productivity of the land.

*Verse 35c..... and the power of the Most High:* As mentioned earlier, "the power of the Most High" and "Holy Spirit" are parallel expressions. In the abstract sense 'power' is translated as *dynamis* (Greek), which occurs seventeen times in Luke-Acts and only twice in Mt and Mark. Luke frequently combines spirit and power as in 1:17, 4:14, Acts 1:8, 6:5, 8. and 10:38.

According to R. E. Brown, it was lack of knowledge of the rules of parallelism in biblical poetry, which make it clear that the "power from the Most High" is synonymous with "Holy Spirit", that caused the patristic and medieval theologians to think that the references in 35b & 35c were respectively to the third and second persons of the Trinity, (so that "power" was the second person descending to take flesh in Mary's womb). He reinstates that there is no evidence that Luke thought of the incarnation or a pre-existence.<sup>34</sup>

..... *will overshadow you....* Luke asserts that the creative, life-giving power of the Most High (cf. verses 35b and 35c above) will overshadow Mary.

The verb *episkiazein* is quite significant in this context since it indicates that the divine presence descended upon Mary, as it had done on the Ark of the Covenant in OT. The Glory of the Lord descended upon the tent of witness and filled it with a Divine presence or *Shekinah*.<sup>35</sup> Ex 40: 35: "The cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of Yahweh filled the Dwelling....." Moses could not enter the tent of meeting, since the cloud stayed over it and the glory of Yahweh filled the Dwelling " (NJB). Other passages in Greek OT which use the verb "to overshadow" to refer to God's presence are; Num. 9:18, 23; Ex 25:20; Ps 91, 140, and Isaiah 4:2-6.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>35</sup> McHugh. *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

In the NT, the verb is used in Acts 5:15 to refer to Peter's shadow. In the Gospels, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at baptism (Mt. 3:16, Mk 1:10, Lk 3:22, Jn 1:32). At the transfiguration a cloud overshadowed the disciples, Peter, James, John, and also Jesus Himself (Mt 17: 5, Mk 9: 7, Lk 9: 34). In both events, baptism and transfiguration, a voice proclaims Jesus as the Son of God. Therefore it is a valid deduction to affirm that Luke combined the two formulas in verses 35b and 35c above.<sup>36</sup>

.....*therefore*.... This conjunction *dio*, expresses a casual connection between the virginal conception and Jesus' divine sonship. Here Luke is concerned with conception christology and not Jesus' pre-existence. Elsewhere "therefore" appears in Lk 7:7, Acts 10: 29, 27:25,34, among others.<sup>37</sup>

.....*the child to be born*..... In the LXX and NT as well as Greek in general *gennao* means "to beget" as a father or "to bear" as a mother.<sup>38</sup> Luke uses *gennomenon*, the present participle passive neuter of *gennan* (beget) with the same connotation as the one given above, that is, *gennao*. It could theoretically mean "the one begotten" but since the words are being addressed to the mother, it means rather "the one being born". Some MSS read; "the child to be born of you." A translation from Latin in the Vulgate, in the light of Hebrew and Greek, reads thus "thus the holy offspring of thine shalt be known for the Son of God."

..... *will be called holy*..... "Will be called holy" is the same as saying "he will be". The translation of this particular line is difficult, since the function of the adjective *hagion* (holy) is not easily determined; neither is it certain whether the neuter form of *hagion* modifies the subject or is a predicate.<sup>40</sup> Notwithstanding the above linguistic discrepancies, R.E. Brown states that the use

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59.

<sup>37</sup> Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p.351.

<sup>38</sup> F. Buchsel, "Gennao". In: Kittel and Friedrich, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

of *hagion* as a subject makes the "son of God" the only predicate of "called", consequently matching v. 32 "will be called the son of the most High".

A number of exegetes favour the use of *hagion* as a predicate, since in v. 32a there are two predicates "great" and "son of the most high". Furthermore the logic of v.35 favours the child being called holy, since the Holy Spirit comes upon Mary.<sup>41</sup>

In Luke 2:23 "holy" is a predicate for child, or some versions have the term "consecrated". Isaiah 4:3 is an LXX expression for "to be called holy". Jesus too, is called "the holy one of God" (Mk 1:24, Lk 4:34 & Jn 6:69 & Acts 3:14).<sup>42</sup> In a later quotation, Peter addresses Jesus as "the Holy and upright One." (Acts 3:14).

.....*the Son of God*..... This formal title does not appear in the Hebrew Bible. However some ancient texts used this title "son of God" to refer to a special relationship to God, for instance, angels and kings. In one of the Qumran texts the title is applied to angels or heavenly beings and also to kings.<sup>43</sup>

For Luke, as for the OT, the title "Son of God" designates in the first place the Messiah (4:41, Acts 9:20,22). However, Luke can also understand the title on the higher level, when it describes the mysterious union of Jesus and God. Unlike Matthew (14:33;16:16;27:54) and Mark (15:39), Luke does not attribute to any man the confession of the title, but, apart from the angelic message, it is found in statements of demons (4:41, 8:28) and of Jesus Himself (10:22; 22:70).<sup>44</sup>

In the next verse (36), the scene changes, as the angel gives the sign after confirmation of the message and the sign of Elizabeth's pregnancy. The mention of Elizabeth prepares the transition to the next episode, the visitation.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Miller Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (NY: The Viking Press, 1968), pp. 261-262.

<sup>44</sup> Leopold Sabourin, S. J., *The Gospel According to Luke* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1984), p. 64.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

*Verse 36: And behold..* This is translated as *kai idou (LXX)*. The above formula "kai idou" occurs four times in the Lucan infancy narratives, for example, in 1:31, 36, 2:25 Behold (*idion*) appears ten times in Luke 1 and 2, whereas in the Matthean infancy narratives it appears six times, Mt. 1:20, 1:23, 2:1, 2:13 and 2:19.<sup>46</sup>

.....*your kinswoman Elizabeth....* *Sungenis* is a feminine form of *sungenes* which means "relative", In this verse Luke does not specify the degree of relationship.<sup>47</sup> Otherwise the relationship between John and Jesus as religious figures in Israel is explicitly affirmed in all four gospels.

.....*in her old age has conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.* In the previous Lucan annunciation it is written thus; "But they were childless; Elizabeth was barren and they were both advanced in years" (Lk 1:7). In Lk 1:18 it is written thus: Zachariah said to the angel, "How can I know this? I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years" Both states of barrenness and old age were the reasons why the couple could not bear a child in the ordinary human circumstances<sup>48</sup>.

The angel Gabriel now reveals the secret which has been kept for five months, that Elizabeth is pregnant.<sup>49</sup> "Some time later his wife Elizabeth conceived and for five months she kept to herself, saying ..." (Lk 1:24).

*Verse 37: For with God nothing will be impossible!* This verse is phrased variably by different versions although its essence is mentioned. For example, in NJB it reads "for nothing is

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (NY: Frank & Wagnalls Co. 1955), p. 84.

<sup>47</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Danielou, *The Infancy Narrative*, transl. by Rosemary Sheed (New York: Herder & Herder. 1968.

<sup>49</sup> Fitzmyer, *op.cit.*, p.3.52.

impossible for God,” but in spite of the variety, the literal translation is “not impossible will be the word (or thing) with God”. This quotation echoes Gen 18:14; “..nothing is impossible for Yahweh”, which are the angelic words to barren Sarah in reference to the birth of Israel. Job 42:2, Zach 8:68 and Jer 32:17 are all parallels to this verse (37).<sup>50</sup> The Hebrew word *dabar* means “thing or word”, (cf. Gen 18:14). The LXX translates *dabar* as *rema* which actually means “word or saying”.<sup>51</sup> The expression (v. 37) “Not ...all” to express “nothing” reveals a Semitic background as in Mt 24:22, Acts 10:43.

Verse 38; **“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord;....”** The feminine form of *doulos* (handmaid) is a slave or servant, the correlation of *Kurios* (Lord) the master and owner of slaves (Ruth 3:9).<sup>52</sup> Mary’s words here are similar to those of Hannah the mother of Samuel (1Sam.1:11), who cried to Yahweh to notice “humiliation of your servant”. In Lk 1:48 and Acts 2:18, the word slave is actually used.

.....***Let it be to me according to your word.***” This phrase literally reads; “O may it be so for me, according to thy word (*rema*)”. Mary’s *fiat*, according to most exegetes is not identical to Jesus’ *fiat* in Gethsemane (Lk 22:42), neither is it identical to that of the Lord’s Prayer ( Mt. 6:10, Lk 11:2) which is the Greek aorist imperative and not optative. It is the identity of the Latin translation of *fiat* in all the three contexts that has influenced the interpretation of Mary’s words as implying humble submission out of obedience, without joy. On the contrary, Fitzmyer and others, contend that Luke 1:38 in Greek does not imply the above meaning but instead uses the optative *genoito*. The later can only be translated as an earnest wish or prayer. Therefore the correct translation of Lk 1:38 is a cry of joy, “O may it be so for me, according to thy word.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Sabourin, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>53</sup> McHugh, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

*And the angel departed from her.....* Just as in Lk 1:23, 56 and 2:20, angelic departure in Luke terminates or closes the scenes, especially infancy narratives. Furthermore in the OT and NT closure of scenes, is a common feature of angelic appearance.<sup>54</sup> For example in Judges 6:21 “....and the angel of Yahweh vanished before his (Gideon) eyes.” After Peter had been guided by the angel, the latter suddenly left him, as is attested in the Book of Acts 12: 11.

### **3. THE STRUCTURE AND THE PATTERN**

The Lucan announcement narratives have some common features in terms of structure, form and pattern. This is precisely the focus of this section. The two Tables 1 and 2 will be an aid to the analysis.

#### **3.1 THE BIBLICAL ANNUNCIATION OF BIRTH**

Table I below illustrates major and common features that recur in the scenes of the Annunciations of Birth in the Bible according to R.E. Brown’s understanding, which is representative of the now interesting researches on the infancy narratives.

Secondly, Table II below is about the structure of the two Lucan annunciation stories about John the Baptist (left hand-side) compared with that of Jesus (right-hand side). In such comparison the parallels and differences inherent in the two narratives will become clear, showing Luke’s artistry and capacity to use literary tools to convey his the message to the readers.

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<sup>54</sup> Herman Hendrickx, The Infancy Narratives (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), pp. 70-77.

TABLE I: BIBLICAL ANNUNCIATION OF BIRTH<sup>55</sup>

The five Steps:

1. The *appearance* of an angel of the Lord (or appearance of the Lord)
2. Fear or prostration of the visionary confronted by this supernatural presence
3. The divine *message*:
  - a. The visionary is addressed by name
  - b. A qualifying phrase describing the visionary
  - c. The visionary is urged not to be afraid
  - d. A woman is with child or is about to be with child
  - e. She will give birth to the (male) child
  - f. The name by which the child is to be called
  - g. An etymology interpreting the name
  - h. The future accomplishments of the child
4. An *objection* by the visionary as to how this can be, or a request for a sign.
5. The *giving of a sign* to reassure the visionary

**Biblical references for the five steps:**

	<i>Ishmael.</i>	<i>Isaac</i>	<i>Samson</i>	<i>John Baptist</i>	<i>Jesus</i>	<i>Jesus</i>
1.	Gen 16:7	Gen. 17:1;18:1	Judg. 13:3	Lk 1:11	Lk 1:26	Mt. 1:20
2.	16:13	17:3;18:2	13:22	1:12	1:29	
3a.	16:8	(17:15)		1:13	1:30	1:20
3b.	16:8	(17:15)			1:28	1:20
3c.			(13:23)	1:13	1:30	1:20
3d.	16:11		13:3		1:31	(1:20)
3e.	16:11	17:19; 18:10	13:4	1:13	1:31	1:21
3f.	16:11	17:19		1:13	1:31	1:21
3g.	16:11	17:17; 18:13-15				1:21
3h.	16:12	17:16,19	13:5	1:15-17	1:32,33,35	1:21
4.		17:17; 18:12	13:8,17	1:18	1:34	
5.		(17:20-21)	13:9,18-21	1:20	1:36-37	

NB: *Parentheses are used to indicate verses where the substance of the step is present but in an unusual form.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

TABLE II: ANNUNCIATION DIPTYCH<sup>56</sup>

(First stage of Lucan Composition)

1:5-25	1:26-45,56
<b>Annunciation about John the Baptist</b>	<b>Annunciation about Jesus</b>
<i>Introduction</i> of the dramatis personae: Zechariah and Elizabeth, of priestly family, aged, barren (5-7).	The angel Gabriel sent to Mary, a virgin betrothed to Joseph of the House of David (26-38)
Annunciation of the conception of JBap delivered by an angel of the Lord (Gabriel) to Zechariah in the Temple(8-23).	Annunciation of the conception of Jesus delivered by Gabriel to Mary in Nazareth.
Setting (8-10): The priestly customs: Zechariah's turn to offer incense. Core (11-20):*	
1. Angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah	1. Gabriel came to Mary
2. Zechariah was startled	2. Mary was startled
3. The message: a. Zechariah	3. The message: a. Hail... Mary b. Favored one
c. Do not be afraid	c. Do not be afraid
e. Elizabeth will bear you a son	d. You will conceive
f. You will call his name John	e. and give birth to a son
h. He will be great before the Lord, etc. (15-17)	f. You will call his name Jesus
4. How am I to know this? The angel's response (19)	He will be great, etc. (32-33)
5. The sign: Behold you will be reduced to silence.	4. How can this be? The angel's response(35)
Conclusion (21-23): Zechariah emerged from the Temple unable to speak. He went back home.	The sign: Behold your relative has conceived.
<i>Epilogue:</i> Elizabeth conceived; she reflected in seclusion in praise of the Lord (24-25)	Mary responded with acceptance and the angel went away.
	<i>Epilogue:</i> Mary went to the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth, who was filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed the praise of the mother of the Lord. Mary returned home (39-45,56)

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

### 3.2. THE ANNUNCIATION OF BIRTH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In reference to Table 1 above, it is well attested that there is an Old Testament annunciation pattern. When the annunciation of Jesus diptych (Table II right-hand side) is studied against the background of the pattern of angelic annunciation of birth in the Bible as shown in Table I; the following basic steps of the angelic annunciation are evident;

1. Appearance of an angel
2. Fear
3. The message
4. The objection
5. The Sign

The above third element is further subdivided into eight items, of which all are present in Lk 1:26-38, except the etymology of the name of Jesus, which is absent in the Brown's categorization.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, there are some materials in Lk 1:26-38 that have no parallels in the above literary pattern. These are:

1. The peculiar manner of Virginal Conception
2. The description of the future accomplishments of the child 1:32-33,35 and
3. The portrait of Mary in 1:34 and 1:38<sup>58</sup>

These three topics will be explicated in the next chapter on "Theological Significance".

Edgar W. Conrad, in his critical analysis of "The Annunciation of Birth in the Old Testament", carefully presents Robert Neff's ABND structure in preference to Brown's (Table I). The above abbreviations stand for the following;

AB - "the announcement of birth introduced by the particle *hinneh*."

N - "the designation of the name".

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

D - "the specification of the child's identity."<sup>59</sup>

This ABND form is represented in the following OT texts Gen. 16:11-12, 17:19; 2Kgs 13:2, Isa 7:14.17 and I Chr 22: 9-10, but not Gen 18. Brown includes Gen 18 in his list (Table I) but in the ABND form it is deliberately excluded.

The structure of the genre as outlined by Brown in Table I, argues Conrad, needs to be modified, since the elements of his structure are missing in all other representatives of the form (except 1:26-38). Whereas the ABND structure is evident in the section 3, the AB is equivalent to 3e, N to 3f and D to 3h in reference to Table I above.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore Conrad suggests that the R.E. Brown's understanding of stereotyped OT language utilized by the NT ought to be qualified. Secondly, the ABND structure recognized by Neff as typical of OT texts announcing the birth of the son is evident in three NT texts; Mt 1:21; Lk 1:13-17; Lk 1:31-33.<sup>61</sup>

Since the analysis of the Lucan annunciation of birth reveals such a perfect conformity to literary form, following the OT model, the question of the historicity of the stereotyped elements can be validly raised. However, it is worth noting that most scholars posit a pre-Gospel annunciation tradition,<sup>62</sup> upon which both Matthew and Luke drew, that concerned the birth of Jesus as Davidic Messiah.

Inspired by the above mentioned tradition, postulates Brown, each evangelist independently formulated an account of the annunciation of Jesus' birth which suits the format of the respective infancy narrative. "Matthew fashioned the story of an annunciation to Joseph because he was working with an infancy narrative based on the careers of the Patriarch Joseph and the baby Moses in Egypt, whereas Luke fashioned the story of the

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<sup>59</sup> Edgar W. Conrad, "The Annunciation of Birth and the Birth of the Messiah".  
In: Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 47, (1985), p. 659.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 659.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 662.

<sup>62</sup> Raymond E Brown, "Gospel Infancy Narrative Research from 1976 to 1986: Part II (Luke)." In: Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 48, (1986). pp. 660-662.

annunciation to Mary, in whom he saw symbolic possibilities as a representative of the “poor” remnant of Israel (the *anawim*) .....<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, as regards the pericope in question (1:26-28), J. Fitzmyer asserts that Luke has taken some of the details of the pre-Lukan and pre-Matthean tradition about the birth of Jesus and modeled an announcement of Jesus’ birth on the stereotype OT pattern in imitation of the announcement of John’s birth in the Baptist source. Luke has inserted it into his reworking of the source, which ended with 1:24a and resumed again in 1:57.<sup>64</sup>

*The judgment that the Lucan annunciation pattern may have been borrowed from an OT model and that therefore the appearance of an angel to Mary may not be historical tradition should not be equated with a denial of divine revelation pertinent to the birth of Jesus.*<sup>65</sup>

The question of the historicity of the tradition or source behind the annunciation narratives in Matthew and Luke is a long debate that cannot be exhausted in our context. However, it is worth taking into account the purpose or rather the intent of the evangelists.

### 3.3 THE TWO ANNUNCIATION SCENES

The annunciation of the birth to Jesus (Lk 1:26-38), which is the second episode of the Lucan infancy narrative, is parallel to the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist in Lk. 1:5-23. As the wondrous birth of John was announced to his father, so Jesus’ wondrous birth will be made known to his mother, Mary.<sup>66</sup>

The following Brown’s analysis of the parallels, in terms of the diptych makes the apparent similarities and differences evident. The comparison between the two annunciations enables us to discover the following:<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Brown, *The Birth of Messiah*, *op.cit.*, p.298.

<sup>64</sup> Fitzmyer, *op.cit.*, p.335.

<sup>65</sup> Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 298.

<sup>66</sup> Fitzmyer, *op.cit.*, p.334.

<sup>67</sup> Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 293.

(a) the presentation of the *dramatis personae* in 1:27 is very brief and flows straight away into the narrative of the angel's appearance, compared to the full introduction given in 1:5-7. This particular difference is intelligible due to the fact that John the Baptist's parents are not mentioned in the Lucan Gospel account of the ministry, unlike Joseph and Mary. The latter two are persons perfectly identifiable by the sources other than the infancy narratives.<sup>68</sup>

(b) The epilogue of the first stage of Lucan composition 1:39-45;56; was widened by the addition of the *magnificat* to a separate scene, that is, the Visitation.

(c) The central part of the Baptist's annunciation can be divided into; (i) setting (ii) a core (iii) a conclusion. Such a subdivision is not possible for the Jesus annunciation. However Fitzmyer attempts to divide the Jesus annunciation in the following terms; (i) The setting and the *dramatis personae* (vv 26-27); (ii) the announcement proper (vv. 28-37); and (iii) Mary's acceptance (v.38).<sup>69</sup>

(d) The appearance of Gabriel to Mary in 1:26-27, gives us only time and place, unlike the appearance of the same angel to Zachariah (1:8-10), whereby a detailed setting in the Temple is given.

(e) Furthermore there is no detailed conclusion in the Jesus annunciation corresponding to 1:21-23.

(f) The scene, like that of the prophet Daniel in the context of liturgy and muteness present in the Baptist annunciation, is absent in the Jesus annunciation although the appearance of same angel Gabriel enables Luke to emphasize the unity of God's plan of salvation.

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<sup>68</sup> Manuel Miguens, OFM., *The Virgin Birth* (Westminster: St. Paul editions, 1981), p.115.

<sup>69</sup> Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

Therefore, it is possible to narrow down the scope by affirming that the real structural parallel is between the central part of the John the Baptist annunciation in 1:8-23 and the whole of the Jesus annunciation in Lk1:26-38.<sup>70</sup>

The above comparison makes sensible Brown's assertion that the core of the Baptist scene, i.e the annunciation itself, might have been composed by Luke on the analogy of the Jesus' scene, which has a simpler structure, which he (Brown) considers to be original. However relatively few scholars hold the same view about the precedence of the Jesus scene.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264-265.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Several factors have become clear in the Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus narrative after the above exegesis. However our task is incomplete or, rather, we can only do justice to the evangelist if we attempt to establish the theological importance of the passage. This is important for our purposes and in the study of the Bible. First of all we shall present briefly the theology of St Luke so as to locate our topic within its proper context. Secondly, there will be a short survey of the gradual development of New Testament Christology, since that is necessary for understanding the christology of the infancy narrative of this gospel. That will lead to the third stage of establishing the theological importance of Lk 1:26-38.

#### 1. LUKE'S THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

##### 1.1 KERYGMATIC STORY

The Gospel of Luke-Acts was written in pluralistic Syrian Antioch around 80-90 AD. Luke addresses a mainly gentile audience with well-to-do members who are painfully rethinking their missionary thrusts in a hostile environment. Such an environment is caused by internal and external controversies.<sup>72</sup> The key question that Luke's communities are concerned with is one of theodicy;

*"If God has not been faithful to the promises made to God's elect people and has allowed their holy city and Temple to be destroyed, what reason do gentile Christians, who believe in this God, have to think that God will be faithful to promises made to them?"<sup>73</sup>*

Luke attempted to respond to the above dilemma in the form of the kerygmatic story, which is actually the third Gospel, by employing themes to give certainty to its readers. He illustrates that through Jesus, God was faithful to promises made to Israel, but in

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<sup>72</sup> Karris, *op. cit.*, p. 676.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

an unexpected way to include gentiles, the poor, Samaritans, the unclean, and the outcasts. Women, who by virtue of their gender always took a second place within the ritual life of Jewish community, are also included. These further included the crippled, the lame, the blind, the deaf and those ritually excluded from full participation in the life of the Church; the religiously unrighteous, sinners and tax collectors<sup>74</sup>. The great reversal theme which is recurrent in Luke, includes all the above-mentioned categories of people, plus the elect people who repent for initially rejecting God's prophet, the chosen one who is Jesus. This is now the reconstituted Israel which affects continuity with the old.

## 1.2. CONTINUITY

Luke depicts a Jesus who, while at times laying aside prescriptions of the law, he nevertheless has regard for the validity of law. Judaism had a strong tradition of prayer and Jesus and his followers have the same tradition. Judaism was founded on twelve tribes and we read of Jesus too selecting the twelve. From Jerusalem God's word goes to all nations.<sup>75</sup> In this way Luke ensures that continuity with the old is maintained.

This question of continuity in Luke is very important. The emphasis placed on the idea of promise and fulfilment enables Luke to establish Jesus' relationship to the time of Israel before him. Secondly, the motifs of apostolic tradition and the gift of the Holy Spirit ensures continuity between the past time of Jesus and the current era of the Church<sup>76</sup>.

## 1.3 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TENSIONS

Luke struggles with a theological task on two fronts:

(i) *Internal*: He engages in polemic against Jewish Christians, who are prone to applying very strict entrance requirements for those who want to join the reconstituted

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<sup>74</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>75</sup> Karris, *op. cit.*, p. 676.

<sup>76</sup> Mark Allan Powell, What Are They Saving About Luke (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 9.

Israel, like the categories of “poor” people mentioned earlier. Such internal objections if persistent would hamper the missionary endeavour of Luke’s communities.

(ii) *External*: The main external problems which the communities face are those of harassment, primarily from local Jewish synagogue leaders (cf. 21:11-19). These problems include the interpretation of scripture, especially how Jesus is the fulfilment of God’s promises. This has an influence on the mission of Jesus.<sup>77</sup>

#### 1.4 THE LUCAN JESUS

Luke’s portrait of Jesus is the main answer to the theodicy question affecting his communities. In his compassionate mission to all, the Lucan Jesus is also the rejected prophet. Luke begins and ends his Gospel with the theme of the fidelity of Jesus’ God. He tells how God’s promises have been fulfilled in the birth of Jesus and ends the Gospel with the same theme as he tells how God has fulfilled the promises by raising Jesus from the dead.<sup>78</sup>

#### 1.5 OTHER LUCAN THEMES

Although Luke’s primary concern is showing God’s fidelity to the people, the other literary and religious themes are developed, not independently, but within the larger pattern. They are the following in summary,<sup>79</sup>

(i) *World-Affirmation*: Luke-Acts is positive toward the world, as God’s creation and arena of history and human activity.

(ii) *The Great Reversal*: The language of “the rich” and “the poor” is significant in Luke. The poor, the lame, Samaritans and gentiles, the tax collectors and women are included among the poor of God.

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<sup>77</sup> Karris, *op. cit.*, p. 676.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-24.

(iii) *Salvation*: The salvific aspect of the Good News is emphasized in Luke. This theme is prominent in distinctively Lucan parables. Jesus the Prophet, King and Saviour is the only one who brings salvation. God's "visitation" is for people's salvation.

(iv) *The Word of God*: This theme is closely connected to that of the prophet and the people. It is through the prophetic word that God addresses the people.

(v) *Conversion*: The word of God demands the acceptance of the prophetic critique and a "turning" of one's life.

(vi) *The Response of Faith*: The first "fruit" of repentance is faith. It involves obedient hearing of the word and endurance. God requires faithfulness in return for fidelity. Essential to the response of faith is the practice of prayer. Jesus prays and teaches his disciples to pray.

## 2. CHRISTOLOGICAL PROCESS

The Christology of Jesus as Messiah, Lord and Son of God, implicit in the annunciation narrative in question ( Lk 1:26-38), has not been a static christology neither has it come about instantly in the way of Christian perception of Jesus at various stages of his manifestation. Since 1:26-38 is primarily a christological identification in its focus.<sup>80</sup> it will be appropriate to begin by presenting briefly the development of christology in New Testament thought. The most synthesized and orderly presentation of such as process in the NT studies has been done by R. E. Brown in his authorship.

A critical examination of the preserved New Testament literature, suggests that early Christian preaching shows that the Second Coming and the Resurrection were moments

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<sup>80</sup> Joseph A Fitzmyer S.J., *Luke The Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), pp. 46-50.

relied upon for expressing the christological identity of Jesus as Messiah, Lord, Son of David and Son of God.<sup>81</sup>

## 2.1. PAULINE LITERATURE

Rm. 1:3-4 reads *“the Gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...”*

The above verses presuppose a pre-Pauline, common theology of the double identity of Jesus as Son of David and Son of God, applied to the resurrection. Most NT scholars affirm that the infancy Gospels applied this christology to the virginal conception. However this was achieved with two identities now simultaneously and not a two “step” process. For resurrection was originally contrasted with a mystery of holiness, so that thorough resurrection Jesus became greater than he had been in the ministry.

However, by the time the Gospels were written (AD 60s), a more developed perception prevailed that Jesus was seen as having been already the Messiah, Son of God, during his public ministry. So the resurrection just revealed more publicly what was there all the time.<sup>82</sup>

## 2.2. MARK

In this Gospel, which is the earliest of the synoptics, we find that Jesus at his baptism was already Son of God (1:11). Only after death is this mystery unravelled by human witness as in Mk 15:39 “Truly this man was the Son of God” in the person of a Roman Centurion. Although Jesus was already Son of God even during his lifetime this was

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<sup>81</sup> Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 709.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

not publicly known in the later Gospels i.e Matthew , Luke and John. The idea of Jesus' identity was pushed back beyond baptism in different ways.<sup>83</sup>

### 2.3. MATTHEW AND LUKE

The mystery of Jesus' identity becomes apparent to his disciples already during his lifetime. The comparison between i) Mt 14:33 and Mk 6: 51-52; and ii) Mt 16:16 and Mk 8:29 is evidence for the above presupposition. Confessions present in Matthew are not found in Mark. Matthew and Luke press it back to Jesus' conception (Lk 1:5-38) in the infancy narratives. Whatever Mk applied at baptism is now applied to the conception of Jesus expressed in angelic words to Mary in Luke and to Joseph in Matthew. Now conception becomes a christological moment and Mt has the magi and shepherds receive the revelation and adore him whereas others, for exemple Herod, reject Him.<sup>84</sup>

### 2.5. JOHN

In this last of the four Gospels in terms of the date of composition, Jesus proclaims himself as the 'Son of Man', the only-begotten of the Father, who was with the Father even before the creation of the world (cf. 3:16, 18; 1:14, 18). He will return to the Father to enjoy the glory which he had with him.<sup>85</sup>

### 2.6 THE INFANCY GOSPEL

The above explication shows how the Matthean and Lucan infancy stories became an infancy Gospel, pre-fixed to the Gospel proper as part of a christological process. Thus infancy narratives became the biographical literature to Matthew and Luke's accounts of Jesus' Ministry and Resurrection, The Gospels now commenced with conception and birth,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Anton Vogtle, "Jesus Christ" In: Bauer, J.E., ed., Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology (London. Sheed and Ward, 1970), pp. 435-436.

continued through a public life and terminated with death and resurrection. No wonder some texts in the ministry Gospel portray some personalities' ignorance of Jesus' identity as Son of David, Son of God and Messiah. For instance, a comparison of the following texts confirms this claim.<sup>86</sup> Mt. 2:3; 2:16 against 13: 54-55, 14:1-2; Lk 1:41, 44 against Lk 7:19.

Since the critical examination of the ministry narratives shows that they were compiled in Christian tradition without the knowledge of the infancy material, the merging of the two independent materials has obviously caused some difficulties in interpretation.<sup>87</sup>

### 3. THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF LUKE 1:26-38

#### 3.1. A CHRISTOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATION

The annunciation pattern does not always concern birth in OT but may also be that of an OT commissioning story or of an OT story of prophetic election. In the earlier case the emphasis falls on the child to be born, in the second case the emphasis is placed rather on the person addressed or being commissioned. When Lk 1:26-38 is analyzed from these different perspectives, a difference of emphasis is conveyed. If Lk 1:26-38 is understood as a literary form of commissioning, then in its primary thrust Mary is being commissioned by God to play a distinctive role in his plan of salvation as in the case of Gideon in Judges 6:11-14 or some prophet of old.<sup>88</sup> However a critical analysis of Lk 1: 26-38 shows that the concern is with Jesus , what he will do and who he is. Moreover, the scene is prefaced to a Gospel about Jesus and so the primary purpose of this scene is not mariological.<sup>89</sup>

Therefore a number of scholars, including E .W. Conrad, Brown and J. Fitzmyer, have concluded after a thorough research on infancy narratives that the episode of Lk 1:26-

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<sup>86</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>87</sup> Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>89</sup> Brown, "Gospel Infancy Narrative Research from 1976 to 1986: Part II (Luke)." In: *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 48 (1986), p. 663.

38 is to be understood primarily as a birth announcement form. Elements of vocation or commission in it are wholly secondary. Therefore this Lucan pericope presents not primarily a mariological commission but a christological identification.<sup>90</sup>

This Lucan episode has two major christological presuppositions (i) Jesus' relation to John the Baptist (ii) Luke's christological concern in this passage (Lk 1: 26-38) is the unusual character of Jesus' conception.<sup>91</sup>

### 3.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

The theme of continuity, as mentioned earlier, is an important one for Luke in his kerygmatic story. The paralleling of the two annunciations conveys continuity between Jesus and John in salvation history, Jesus or the Church on the one hand and Israel on the other. The link between the annunciation of birth of Elizabeth's son and Mary's son thus foreshadows this theme.

The superiority of Jesus over John is here emphasized by the evangelist. Whereas John the Baptist will go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah (1:17), Jesus will reign over the house of Jacob forever".

### 3.3 JESUS' CONCEPTION

The affirmation of Jesus' being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit without the involvement of a human father is found in Matthew's angelic annunciation to Joseph and Lucan annunciation by the angel Gabriel to Mary. The debate on the historicity of the Virginal Conception of Jesus is still on, despite the fact that the evangelists composed their literature in 60-80 AD.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>91</sup> Charles H. Talbert, Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the third Gospel, (New York: Crossword, 1982), p. 19

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

As regards the sensitive question of the historicity of the virginal conception, R.E. Brown concludes his scholarly survey as follows: *My judgment in conclusion is that the totality of the scientifically controllable evidence leaves an unresolved problem.*<sup>93</sup> Since the purpose of this section is to treat Jesus' conception as a theological topic based on Scripture (1:26-38), therefore the focus will be precisely that. The following quotation points to our direction now:

*Matthew and Luke are interested in virginal conception as a sign of divine choice and grace, and as the idiom of a christological insight that Jesus was God's son or the Davidic Messiah from birth.*<sup>94</sup>

Luke does not address the issues that arose later in Church history, these are:

- (i) a miraculous birth of the child, giving birth without Mary's physical organs remaining intact
- (ii) the perpetual virginity of Mary. What Luke speaks of is that Mary was a virgin before giving birth and she conceived without sexual intercourse with a man. Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, (1:35) and it is by such a conception that Jesus is the Son of God.

In Christian History, virginal conception has functioned theologically in various ways:

- (i) faced with a docetist problem of the denial of Jesus' humanity, emphasis was placed on his birth as a sign or evidence of his humanity 7:2, 18:2
- (ii) Augustine of Hippo held the idea that conception by the Holy Spirit is the means by which Jesus avoided the taint of original sin and could be the sinless Saviour.

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<sup>93</sup> Brown, Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection, op. cit., p. 266.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

(iii) Protestant Orthodox saw the indisputable proof of the truth of Christianity in the miracle of Jesus and in the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy in Jesus' career.<sup>95</sup>

### *A. Conception Christology*

Jesus' virginal conception explains his later greatness. Jesus was what he was because he was divinely begotten. There was never a moment on earth when Jesus did not have this divine identity. In Luke's conception christology the two sonships (Son of David, and Son of God) are simultaneous. In the plan of Luke's whole work the christological message is both artistic and insistent. Jesus' identity as God's son is proclaimed by an angel at his conception, Jesus himself proclaims it the first time he speaks (2:49); it is proclaimed by God at the baptism (3:22) and by Paul after the resurrection (acts 13:32-33).<sup>96</sup>

### *B. Exaltation Christology*

The Gospel of Luke-Acts employs an exaltation Christology: Jesus in his earthly life is the descendant of David and heir to the promises of the Jewish scriptures. He is raised to the exalted status of God's son with power by virtue of his resurrection. He rules from heaven as Lord over all intervening on behalf of his people to deliver and protect them.

This exaltation functioned to express the Church's experience of Jesus Christ in a two-fold way.

(i) As the present Lord who reigns from heaven. The resurrection of Jesus, was considered as his enthronement in heaven. His exaltation after death identifies him as the Lord.

(ii) A historical figure whose story is normative for us. The explanation for his unique earthly life being his virginal conception. Jesus' earthly life was what it was because of his virginal conception. Christology and genre concur at this point<sup>97</sup>. In such an exaltation schema,

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<sup>95</sup> Talbert. *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>96</sup> Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1994. ), p. 131

<sup>97</sup> Talbert. *op. cit.*, p.21.

therefore, it was theologically important to begin with a miraculous conception to avoid an interpretation of the earthly life of Jesus and his followers in terms of merit. The greatness of Jesus' life was not due to his own merit, neither was it in any way a human achievement, but rather the result of divine intervention. Furthermore, the career of Jesus was not the result of perfection of human striving and effort; but rather only God can produce a life like his. In the Lucan perspective, therefore, the miraculous conception is an affirmation of God's grace that excludes all human merit.<sup>98</sup>

#### 4. THE LUCAN PORTRAIT OF MARY

Mary has a significant role to play in the realization of Luke's theme of Salvation History. Luke's portrait of Mary is unique and purposeful. As was mentioned in the previous section above, the emphasis in the Lucan scene of the annunciation of the birth of Jesus (1:26-38) is primarily christological. In the following investigation, the focus is now on the secondary aspect.

##### 4.1 VIRGINAL CONCEPTION

Secondary affirmation of 1:26-38 is mariological in that it sets forth the virginal conception of Jesus by Mary. Mary's virginity before the birth of Jesus is affirmed forthwith. Her conception is more than the overcoming of bareness, as in the case of Elizabeth, but rather a conception of the child who is the son of God without sexual intercourse with man. The extraordinary character of the child and the role he is destined to play in God's salvation history are hereby emphasized. Therefore, Mary's role is at the service of the role of her son, making the period of Israel as its beginning.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Fitzmyer. *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

## 4.2 HANDMAID OF THE LORD.

This Lucan scene ends with the Luke's portrayal of Mary as an example of how God can make out of human nothingness an exalted instrument. A simple Jewish virgin who is in fact betrothed to a man, realizes that her role is reversed. In the period of Israel Mary and Joseph are not even famous individuals in Israel. Moreover, she herself was a woman and among the *poor* of Israel. Luke, whose Gospel is filled with compassion and love for the poor, saw salvation through the lowly, people who were humble enough to accept it as an undeserved gift from God.<sup>100</sup>

Mary is chosen and is graciously and highly favoured. God has elected her to conceive the Messiah (31-33) and give birth to the Son of God (v. 35). The messenger of God elicited from her a cooperative response. She is the servant of Yahweh and the "handmaid of the Lord". Mary is God's obedient, fully responsive instrument in the birth and destiny of the child who is to bring salvation, forgiveness and peace to humanity in a new way. Therefore, God, the Lord of History, manifests his choice of an instrument to realise his plan of salvation, and Mary's *Fiat* becomes the expression of her willing acceptance in that realization of her cooperation with divine grace.

The main interest of Luke, therefore, is to present Mary as a model of Christian discipleship. Her reaction in Lucan infancy narratives is that of acceptance, obedience and humility. Luke transforms Mary from a historical mother of Jesus to an independent personal, active agent who co-operates with God in the redemption of humanity.<sup>102</sup> Mary is indeed a model believer and one who belongs to the Family of Jesus, a faithful disciple worth imitating.

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<sup>100</sup> McHugh, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>102</sup> Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Mary the Pilgrim of Faith for African Women." In: Kinoti, H. W., and J. M. Waliggo, eds., The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology ( Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1997), p. 168.

## CHAPTER THREE

### APPLICATION TODAY

The study of this Lucan pericope of the annunciation of the birth of Jesus in our context will be comprehensive not only by doing the exegesis (Chapter 1) and an inquiry into its theological significance (Chapter 2) but also by applying it in our situation. The Gospels are not just literary master pieces of the past genius, but a proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ in our Christian understanding. Therefore in this third and last chapter of our biblical investigation of this passage, it is necessary to find out its relevance in our African Christian context. This already defines the scope and extent of this task.

#### 1. BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

The question of how the Bible should be interpreted, has been and is being interpreted by Africans is very important at the moment. It has been recommended that the use of Biblical critical methods; historical, textual, source, form, redaction and others, will help in understanding the Bible and thus aid in its interpretation within the African context. It will also aid in the translation of the scriptures into mother tongues so that many Africans can have access to and know the contents of the Bible.<sup>103</sup>

##### 1.1 INCULTURATION

Proclamation of the Gospel to all peoples of the earth is almost incomprehensible without inculturation, which is understood to be the encounter of the Gospel with all cultures of the world or rather the encounter of the Good News with all the people of the earth through instrumentality of their culture. (Synod of Bishops for Africa, 1995). While

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<sup>103</sup> Emmanuel Adow Obeng., " The Use of Biblical Critical Methods in Rooting the Scriptures in Africa." In: Kinoti H. W. and J. M. Waliggo. eds., The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1997), p. 8.

commending on the interpretation of the Bible in the life of Church, Pope John Paul II wrote thus:

*While actualization allows the Bible to be fruitful at different periods, inculturation in a corresponding way looks to the diversity of place: it ensures that the biblical message take root in a great variety of terrain. This diversity is to be sure, never total. Every authentic culture is, in fact, in its own way the bearer of universal values established by God.<sup>104</sup>*

## 1.2. AFRICAN HERITAGE AND CONTINUITY

The angel Gabriel proclaimed to Mary that she was to conceive in her womb and bear a son, Jesus, the Messiah, Son of God. As we saw earlier, the above Lucan Christological statement is a proclamation that Jesus was the Son of God from the first moment of his conception. God chose a poor woman of the obscure Nazareth, a virgin, as his instrument to accomplish his plan of salvation.

In emphasizing the idea of God's promise and fulfillment in Jesus, Luke establishes Jesus' relationship to the time of Israel before him. Likewise there is a relationship between Jesus and the period of Africa before evangelization. There are values in African Traditional Religion (ATR) that are at the same time gospel values.<sup>105</sup>

John the Baptist's parents, and Jesus' parents who belonged to the period of Israel, bear a Son who prepares a way for Mary's Son, who is greater and himself is the fulfillment of the promise of salvation. Through the instrumentality of ATR, God also prepared a fertile ground for the message of Christ. If such a continuity is valued, then it will contribute to the incarnation of the Gospel message in African culture.

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<sup>104</sup> John Paul II. The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church. (Nairobi: Pauline Publication of Africa, 1994), p.108.

<sup>105</sup> John Paul II. Apostolic Exhortation. Ecclesia in Africa. (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1995), p. 33.

## 2. A QUEST FOR AN AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

We are now celebrating two thousand years of Christianity in the world and in Africa. Efforts have been made by scholars to formulate African Theology (or Theologies) of inculturation and liberation.<sup>106</sup> However, there is still much to be done as regards the area of christology as we encounter new insights into from our Biblical Studies.

Incarnation has already been affirmed as a theological basis for inculturation. However, as we established earlier after the exegesis, conception is a christological moment for Mt and Lk. They do not presuppose pre-existence (incarnation) of Jesus, unlike John. Therefore conception (Matthew and Luke) as christological moment is also a theological basis for inculturation. Conception christology, when studied and reflected theologically using African categories, will;

- (i) greatly enhance our understanding of Jesus Christ;
- (ii) challenge us to respect and uphold our esteem for the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception;
- (iii) improve our appreciation for the motherhood vocation which is essential for the stability of marriage and family; recognition that the woman is the heart of the family, for the family evolves around her.<sup>107</sup>
- (iv) respect expectant mothers and appreciate the sacred responsibility they undertake in taking care of a human life that is totally dependent on them. In African traditional spirituality, human life is sacred by virtue of its origin from the Creator;
- (v) In Africa, Christmas is the feast widely celebrated. One of the major reasons for this phenomenon is the regard Africans have for the *conception* of a child and consequently the birth, since;

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<sup>106</sup> Charles Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today." In: Schreier, J. Robert, ed., Faces of Jesus in Africa (N.Y: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Ogola Margaret, "The Role of Woman in the African Family Today." African Christian Studies, Vol. 11(2), 1995, pp. 59-60.

- a) the relationship with the living, ancestors, the living dead and the yet-to-be born members of the society, is enhanced for example through naming;
- b) fecundity of the parents are recognized and their social status raised;
- c) it contributes to the stability of marriage and
- d) establishment of the family among many other reasons. All this is possible only if the expectant mother and her unborn child are treated with care, prayed for, given special attention and protected against any possible dangers.

That further explains why the season of **Advent** is valued greatly by Christians in Africa. The theme of Advent will be dealt with later.

(vi) Conception christology will also enhance our anthropomorphic view of God as Mother. Naturally only a *woman* has the ability to conceive a child. However, the *act* of conception in itself (*per se*) is neither male nor female. Although theologically God is neither male nor female, we however symbolically refer to Him\Her in our limited human categories. Therefore, if we can refer to God as Father, likewise we can address him as Mother, in so far as we are conscious of his transcendence. The latter image of God has been neglected, partly due to our predominantly African patriarchal world-view and the description of God given by missionaries. African Christians from matrilineal societies can more easily incorporate such views (God as Mother) than those of the patrilineal background. The maternal image of God will complement and widen our view of God. It also provides an opportunity to the children and even adults whom “the father” model is obscure to them due to the rejection and denial of love they have experienced from their earthly fathers.

### **3. DIGNITY OF WOMEN**

The dignity and rights of African women as human beings are not yet fully recognized in the contemporary African society. Women are victims of gender

discrimination, domestic violence and the predominantly patriarchal society they live in, regards them as the weaker sex and inferior to men. They are further denied an opportunity to utilize their God-given talents and gifts. The Church has not been an exception either.<sup>108</sup> This is a pastoral problem in the African Church, just as in the civil society and in other religions.

However, what we learnt from the investigation of Lk 1: 26-38 can help us in the above pastoral problem. From the preceding chapters of this essay we have seen that Luke includes women among the People of God. His vision went contrary to the prevailing negative attitudes towards them. Women play active roles in the Gospel of Luke, for example:

- i) The angel of God was sent to a woman
- ii) A woman is the first to receive the message of annunciation of the birth of the Messiah,
- (iii) The woman whom God chose co-operated with the grace of God by freely consenting to His will:
- iv) Jesus, the Messiah, Son of David and Son of God, is carried in the womb of a woman for nine months before externally manifesting himself to others. In Israel, there were kings, queens, nobles, the rich and great people who were highly respected and revered. The Messiah was expected to belong to that category. However God reverses the roles expected and sends his angel to a virgin of Nazareth to be the mother of the Messiah. Neither Joseph nor Mary is a significant figure in Israel. Mary, in the Lucan narratives, is a representative of the 'poor' (*anawim*), the powerless. Luke portrays Mary in such a way as to show how God reverses the poverty and powerlessness of the human condition. Jesus was born of a woman and in his humanity is nourished and nurtured by a woman.

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<sup>108</sup> Lawrence Magesa, "African Women, Christology and Ministry", *AFER*, Vol. 38 (2), 1996, pp. 69-73.

(vi) Because of what God did for women in Israel, the pastoral challenge we have is to affirm the equality of man and woman; respect the dignity of women and regard them as full human beings created in the image of God. The Son of God exalted our humanity.

(vii) Women are also gifted with abilities and talents for the progress of humankind. They have proved in recent times to be active agents of evangelization. Their motherhood roles and vocation makes them primary evangelizers in the family, in the society, Small Christian Communities and in the Church as a whole.

#### **4. PRAYER AND LITURGY**

##### **4.1. PRAYER**

The Primary focus of Lk 1: 26-38 as has been established is christological and secondarily mariological. Our liturgy ought to be christocentric. Prayer is a response of faith in Jesus Christ. Through prayer we encounter God in our own way, as Mary did at the annunciation. As Christians we pray to the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. Prayer is a value in ATR that should also be uphold in our African Christianity.

##### **4.2 LITURGY**

The Scriptural passage on the annunciation of the birth of Jesus on the liturgical calendar is read every year on the Fourth Sunday of Advent B, the ferial of December 20th and on the solemnities of the Annunciation of the Lord and the Immaculate conception of Mary. The feast of the Annunciation is celebrated yearly on 25th March and it happens that it comes during the Lenten season, or at times during Holy Week. This obviously affects the mood of celebration.

From the interview I conducted with the Catholics of the non-Latin Rites, I learnt that on the Feast of the Annunciation, unlike in the Latin Rite, the *Alleluia* is sung and the

actual celebration in and outside the liturgy takes place. I propose as part of inculturation too that it would be more relevant if we of the Roman Rite incorporated such a joyful mode of celebrating the Annunciation of the Lord, which is a fundamental mystery of our faith and an event in the life of Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### 4.3 ADVENT

In Liturgical history we learn that Christians began celebrating Christmas around 4 AD before the introduction of the Advent liturgy.<sup>109</sup> A close scrutiny of the liturgical readings of Advent (Latin Rite) shows that the emphasis is placed on the Second Coming of Christ (adapted from the Eastern Liturgy) with all those terrifying images, during the first three weeks of Advent. Pastorally this is misplaced and distorts the mood of the season preceding the celebration of the Birth of our Saviour whom African Christians rightly reckon as a hero whose coming was even foretold beforehand. I propose as part of liturgical adaptation to reserve the Readings of the Second Coming to the last week of the Liturgical year (34). Readings relevant to the theme of preparation of the Birth of Jesus could be emphasized during the whole season of Advent. Existentially, advent reminds us of the mystery of human life that begins long before one is finally born into the world. This in turn evokes a response of praise and worship to the Supreme Being who is the source of life.

### 5. HOLY SPIRIT

The Son of God was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit is still at work today. As a factor of adaptation, the Spirit continues to guide the Church even now. He\She does not according to Luke, discriminate against the poor, women, the young, the illiterate or the despised by the society. This is the

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<sup>109</sup>W. J. O'Shea, "Advent." In: McDonald J. William, ed., New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 1, (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1965), pp. 152-153.

challenge for our African society to discard discrimination on the basis of gender, colour, religion and culture. In exegesis we discovered that in Hebrew the word for the Holy Spirit is feminine and neuter in Greek. In most African languages and in Christian theology, the Spirit is neither male nor female but Spirit and therefore beyond gender, human limitation and control.

## 6. SALVATION

The Davidic Messiah, and heir of the reign of Jacob was to be the saviour of Israel and conqueror of other nations. The angelic messenger reveals to Mary that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah, heir of his father's reign. Now that we are in the period of post-resurrection, we are challenged to accept Christ and proclaim his message.

(i) *Salvation and Theologies of Liberation*: Jesus inaugurated the year of the Lord. Africa is in need of liberation from spiritual captivity, from the oppressive social, economic and traditional structures. African Feminist and Liberation Theologies make use of History of Salvation as an inspiration in the long road to experience the liberating message of the Gospel of Christ.

(ii) *Salvation for the 'Poor'*: In Luke the poor are those who are humble enough to listen to the word of God and act upon it in faith. The model believer and disciple, i.e Mary is presented by Luke as an example worth imitating and representative of those who allow God to accomplish the plan of salvation in them (LG 55-59).

Mary is referred to as the "fairest of love" in the one of the recent encyclicals on the Family. "*The History of fairest love begins at Annunciation, in those wondrous words which the angel spoke to Mary, called to become mother of the Son of God. ....*" (John Paul II, Letter to The Families, Nairobi: St. Publications, 1994, pp. 66-67).

The faithful are exhorted to emulate her and have Christ as their goal.

Jesus' name came to be popularly understood as a form of the root of the word "save" in Hebrew as we saw in the exegesis. In Luke salvation is achieved in and by Jesus Christ. God has always acted in him in view of salvation. We are to work for the salvation of all people irrespective of their background.

## CONCLUSION

The gospel is indeed prefigured in the infancy narratives where it is contained in a nutshell. The critical study of this Lucan pericope has taken us through the exegesis which is the main part of this essay, has enabled us to acquire a deeper meaning of the text and its literary presuppositions. The further inquiry into the theological import of the passage has been quite dramatic as the christological thrust of the passage unfolded. Indeed the evangelist intended to convey a message to his audience.

Inculturation of the Bible in Africa is no longer a myth. It is the challenge of the African scholars, theologians, pastors, ministers and Christians to understand the Bible before doing the inculturation. The later process cannot be achieved empty-handed.

Therefore each one of us is challenged to appropriate the message of the gospel in his or her own existential environment, to experience the Christ Jesus in one's own life like the model believer we have. Since God has taken initiative to reveal Christ, His Son to the people of Africa, let this Son be nurtured and be born on here among us. We are called to respond to this offer of salvation and be agents as well.

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